

Have a drink...

Alcohol is integral to the Australian way of life. The weekend BarBee, a game of footy and most gatherings invariably involve some form of alcohol consumption. Humans from the Neolithic era, the Ancient Greeks and Romans all enjoyed wine in abundance. Thousands of years of enjoyment are hardly going to stop now!

Drinking moderate amounts of alcohol has proven benefits to health, such as being protective from heart disease. The French paradox is that despite regular and generous drinking of red wine, heart disease is not as high in French people. This may be due to the anthocyanins in the wine, an antioxidant also found in beets, plums and berries.

There is a difference between alcohol use and abuse. Abusive drinking is fraught with dangers. An alcoholic is defined as someone who attains 35-50% of total daily energy intake from alcohol. This equates to anything over 1-2 standard drinks per day for women and 2-3 drinks per day for men. The absence of 2 consecutive alcohol free days per week is also a factor in defining alcoholism.

Alcohol affects the body in many ways. Firstly it increases stomach acid secretion, lowers blood pressure and changes heart rate. It can also create facial skin flushing, dizziness, a loss of inhibition and slurred speech. Hours after drinking more than one standard drink per hour, a hangover with thumping headache, muscle weakness, shakes, numbness in hands or feet and nausea can occur.

The longer term effects of high alcohol intake can include liver damage, brain damage, memory loss, depression, heart disease, increased risk of cancer and osteoporosis. Ongoing intake of alcohol leads to tolerance, an adjustment that enables the liver to deal with more alcohol, wreaking more damage in the body. The sociological effects of alcohol abuse include increased car accidents, poor work performance, relationship breakdown and less bright citizens.

Minimise the damage caused by alcohol ingestion by adopting some strategies and natural supplements. Sufficient water is paramount to avoiding dehydration, but easy to forget when drunk. Drink up during the day before, and discipline yourself to have 3 glasses before going to sleep.

Alcohol is an energy rich, but nutrient poor energy source. Alcohol can't be stored in the body, it must be burnt or transformed. The amount of energy contained in alcohol per gram is slightly less than the amount in a gram of fat. To use up the excess energy, dance more regularly when drinking.

The nutrients used to convert alcohol in the body include magnesium, glutathione, which is made up in part by Selenium, and the B vitamins. The loss of these can be rectified with a quality multi vitamin with the full spectrum of B vitamins, including folate. The conversion process generates free radicals in the body. Drinking fruit juices intermittently throughout the drinking session will assist the liver in effectively metabolising alcohol. The herb, St Mary's thistle, acts as a liver tonic. It contains glutathione and serves as great liver preparation before a big night.

Being aware and minimising alcohol's negative effects can allow full enjoyment of life in our lucky country.

By Sally Mathrick – Naturopath - smile@soundmedicine.com.au



sound
medicine